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LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence: The Invisible Relationship

I have personally experienced LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). My topic is important because those who experience intimate partner violence, and who are LGBT or in queer relationships, are not provided information about IPV as often as heterosexual individuals. I hope readers will learn and realize that individuals in the LGBT community can face IPV, and that this issue needs more discussion. IPV is not something that affects one facet of someone's life; it can affect multiple parts.

Introduction

This essay is about Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) intimate partner violence (IPV). I am writing about this because I have personally experienced LGBTQ IPV. This topic is important because those who experience IPV, and who are LGBTQ or in queer relationships, are not provided information about IPV as often as heterosexual individuals. I hope readers will learn and realize that individuals in the LGBTQ community can face IPV and it is something that needs to be discussed and talked about more. IPV is not something that affects one facet of someone's life; it can affect multiple parts. This paper provides information that specifically focuses on LGBTQ IPV because of the relationship that I share with it.

What We Know

IPV happens over and over again in relationships, as it did in mine. Many victims are sadly unaware of what is happening to them just like I was. No one should be left in the

dark about IPV. When you hear about abusive relationships, you never think it can happen to you. Further, I did not believe it could happen to me, especially because I was not in a stereotypical heteronormative relationship. The reality is that I am not the only one who has faced this. Many LGBTQ youth, adolescents, and young adults experience the same things at numbers estimated to be higher than heterosexual relationships (Messinger, 2017). Messinger also writes that of those who are in a relationship consisting of two men, over half are likely to face a form of IPV and out of all the relationships that consist of two women, about three quarters are estimated to face IPV. I wish that I had known that the reality of me being in an abusive relationship was very high. If I had known, I might have been aware sooner, and once I realized what I was going through, I might not have been as embarrassed to reach out to people to tell them what I was going through.

Without having a survey that takes all sexual orientations into account, a correct representation about IPV may be hard to come by. The idea of sexuality being fluid is a hard concept for some people to grasp. Badenes-Ribera, Frias-Navarro, Bonilla-Campos, Pons-Salvador, & Monerde-i-Bort (2014)

discuss the idea of sexuality being fluid and how little to no surveys take the idea of sexual fluidity into account. A point the authors make is that although someone may be in a same-sex relationship, they may not identify as a member of the LGBTQ community (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2014). This is an important piece of information because many surveys are interested only in LGBTQ members and some individuals may not identify as LGBTQ but have same-sex tendencies (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2014).

Edwards, Littleton, Sylaska, Crossman, and Craig (2016) discuss what groups are usually surveyed when researching information on IPV in the college setting. They found that heterosexual relationships are more frequently looked at and studied whereas LGBTQ relationships are often left out. This can be detrimental to understanding intimate dating practices in the college climate. Edwards et al. (2016) estimate that “up to 18% of college student report having engaged in sexual behavior with someone of the same sex” (p. 17). This is a large number of college students who are in a same-sex relationship and could face IPV. Without studies being done on IPV in LGBTQ relationships, potential student victims may never have knowledge

about the abusive relationships they are in. Although individuals who engage in sexual intercourse with the same sex may not identify as LGBTQ, or date one another, they might still be put into a situation where they face IPV and not know this could happen to them. All of the information that I received in high school about IPV related to heteronormative society and only included heterosexual men and women. I thought that only heterosexual men and women who were together could be in abusive relationships. According to Edwards et al. (2016), there is limited evidence of IPV in LGBTQ relationships, but they go on to note that some of the research indicates that IPV and sexual assault among college students is more prevalent in LGBTQ relationships than in heterosexual relationships. Carvalho, Lewis, Derlega, Winstead and Viggiano (2011) discuss the discrepancies between studies. Older studies often estimated that IPV was lower in LGBTQ relationships than heterosexual relationships. Messinger (2017) suggests that IPV is actually higher in LGBTQ relationships than heterosexual relationships, and also discusses the prevalence of IPV in same-sex relationships. He writes that lesbian women are more likely to face all types

of IPV compared to gay men, but there is not a huge difference (Messinger, 2017). Both groups of individuals face IPV and discussions and information on the topic should be held/given on a more regular basis. Edwards et al. (2016) found that LGBT individuals are more likely to stay in abusive relationships because of the lack of information about such abuse. This same study also found a correlation between the two relationship groups and that they stay in their relationships for some of the same reasons (Edwards et al., 2016). This was true for me. I struggled to come to terms with what I was going through. As I look back on my education, it is because of the lack of general knowledge that I had about IPV that I did not realize it was something that concerned me.

Greene, Fisher, Kuper, Andrews and Mustanski (2014) discuss the importance of supportive peer relationships among LGBTQ individuals. Individuals who are supporting those LGB or someone who is queer or transgender and in a relationship should be informed that intimate partner violence does not just happen to cisgender/heterosexual people. This is something that can happen to anyone no matter who they are or what relationships they claim. Relationship violence does not occur exclusively in heterosexual relationships,

where the male in the relationship is beating his female partner. Relationship violence also happens in many different ways, not just as physical abuse. Emotional, mental, financial, neglect, and sexual abuse are all things that can happen when a person is facing IPV. Not only did I face emotional and mental abuse, but I also experienced physical abuse that I am choosing not to discuss. While I did face physical abuse, I thought that it was okay. I only ever heard of men hitting women in these situations, never two women abusing each other. Had I known that IPV comes in all forms and can be experienced by anyone I may have left the relationship sooner. IPV education needs to be taught, and needs to be taught with all sexualities included. Groups of individuals who are in non-heterosexual relationships should not be invisible.

Invisibility of Same-Sex Relationships

Messinger (2017) discusses the invisibility of the queer relationship within the United States and around the world. In the U.S. queer men were less likely to find an IPV agency that serves that population of individuals compared to queer women. Queer women still struggle to find help, but there is more

offered to them than to queer men. This is not surprising since IPV is more commonly reported as a male on female crime in heterosexual relationship, so male victims are often overlooked in this regard. Men reporting same-sex IPV challenges masculinity and can make men afraid of speaking up. IPV services are aimed towards heterosexual women in the U.S, although queer women can still benefit from services because of that. Even with this, it is important to offer services that are specific to LGBTQ individuals. This is necessary because this group of individuals is underrepresented and not informed about valuable things that heterosexual individuals are privileged to, like sex education. According to Greene, Fisher, Kuper, Andrews and Mustanski (2014), there are no known programs that have published effective studies focused on IPV in LGBTQ adolescent relationships. This is concerning because violence among LGBTQ adolescent intimate partners is very high according to Greene et al. (2014).

Long-held perceptions and beliefs of LGBTQ relationships have affected the way people view and treat those relationships. The heterosexual ideology, and the idea that only men beat women, has created a societal expectation that IPV only happens in heterosexual

relationships. Baker, Buick, Kim, Moniz, and Nava (2012), explain that LGBTQ IPV can be a difficult idea to grasp because it shows that men can abuse men and women can abuse women. This is a difficult idea to process because throughout 1960-1976 IPV was considered 'wife abuse' and always portrayed as men abusing women. Messinger (2017) states that a lot of the stereotypes surrounding IPV only occurring in heterosexual relationships stem from the movement on ending men's violence against women. He also discusses the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ individuals by the United Nations and the World Health Organization when covering topics on IPV. This is detrimental because those who are facing IPV in countries where LGBTQ individuals may not be accepted, or in countries where they are accepted but topics such as IPV in the LGBTQ community are not dealt with, do not have a set of guidelines or information to guide intervention practices. These organizations are supposed to help and support all people; how can they do this if they are not supporting LGBTQ individuals as well?

Edwards et al. (2016) found that LGBTQ individuals who carried out IPV as the perpetrator were almost all victims of IPV themselves before becoming the

perpetrator. If individuals who face IPV are more likely to become the perpetrators, then more resources that are informational should be provided to LGBTQ individuals. Edwards and Sylaska (2012) discuss the disempowerment theory, which revolves around the idea that "...individuals who feel inadequate and lack self-efficiency are at increased risk of using non-traditional means of power assertion, such as violence" (p. 1722). Crossman and Craig (2016) also found correlation between internalized homophobia and heterosexist discrimination, which factored into IPV and the perpetrator who is carrying out the abuse. This can have a lot to do with overcompensating the assertion for power because an LGBTQ individual may feel like they have no power due to being part of a marginalized group.

Not only are LGBTQ adolescents at a higher risk for IPV, the lack of knowledge and acceptance by their communities of LGBTQ relationships can affect their romantic relationships. Researchers attribute homophobic control behaviors as important and pervasive to IPV in LGBTQ relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2014). Internalized homophobia is something that a lot of LGBTQ members face. Partners who reveal someone's sexual orientation, or reveal

an attraction that would be different to the idolized heterosexual attraction of western culture, engage in a form of IPV. This was one of the scariest things that I faced. The pain and suffering that I went through from the emotional and physical abuse does not compare to how scared I was to be outed. Being outed made me feel like I was slowly drowning in quicksand. I just kept sinking and sinking. I became worried that my family might find out, and I was worried that my best friend's parents who were very conservative would hate me and not let us see each other anymore or have sleepovers.

Social acceptance is another factor that queer individuals have to fight against in order to receive services. Messinger (2017) states, "...the struggle to legitimize LGBTQ IPV as a genuine public-health concern is rooted in the struggle to legitimize LGBTQ human rights" (p.18). Before society accepts that IPV is a public health concern, society as a whole needs to accept queer individuals. If same-sex relationships are not viewed as just another relationship, how can they receive the same services that heterosexual relationships do? Have we strayed from the heteronormative model? Society's binary thinking, black vs. white, girl vs. boy, rich vs. poor, and straight vs. gay can make it difficult for

people who do not fit into the dominant identity to have a positive experience in their "other" identification. People who are stuck in the heteronormative mindset of society have difficulty understanding things that might be outside of the binary. This includes individuals who are transgender or those who are pansexual and attracted to all genders.

Moving Forward

Some people are raised not to consider LGBTQ relationships to be valid ones. People may not even be taught that they exist; therefore, many people may find the idea of IPV in LGBTQ relationships to be preposterous (Messinger, 2017). Societal discrimination is detrimental to the fight for equality for representation when discussing IPV. Discrimination and lack of representation can lead victims of LGBTQ IPV to not recognize and have validation of their IPV situations. We need to educate people in our society on these topics and issues. My goal is to help break the silence. Through continuing my education and studying for a Master's Degree in Social Work, I can advocate and educate the people around me on issues such as this. No one should ever have to experience Intimate Partner Violence.

Currently, I have a GPA that is over 3.65. I am a double major in Social Work and Women and Gender Studies. I am looking at a master's-level school. I purchased my own car, and I have lost love and found new love. All of these accomplishments and experiences are things that I never could have dreamed of happening without family and friends supporting me with what happened to me. I am grateful to have learned about IPV when I did, but it should have been sooner. The American education system with societal norms of cisgender/heterosexual ideology is failing its youth. IPV education should start at a young age. Children should be encouraged to practice personal bodily autonomy and know the signs of an abusive relationship. Not only should they know the signs, they should be

encouraged to talk about it so it becomes a topic widely discussed.

My abusive relationship was difficult to handle on my own. What helped me through it were my friends and family. I do not know what I would do but for my friends standing by my side when I was telling my story or when I needed a shoulder to cry on. They encouraged me to educate those around me on IPV and the disparities that surround LGBTQ issues. My mom and dad give me their continued support and make me feel loved. I am so grateful for them. I thought that I would never find anyone, or that I would never trust anyone ever again. I have found love and lost love since then. I learned so much from that relationship. I learned what real love was and was not. I learned about my own strength, how to trust others, and how to persevere.

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